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ABSTRACT

Following an exposition of the differences between comparative librarianship and international librarianship, this paper advocates comparative studies for use by developing nations. The discussion emphasizes the necessity for adequately defining the historical and environmental context of library concerns as a prelude to an explanation of two approaches to comparative studies in librarianship: comparisons between non-industrialized countries, and comparisons between industrialized and non-industrialized countries. Seven references are listed. (EAA)

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THE USEFULNESS OF COMPARATIVE LIBRARIANSHIP IN RELATION TO NON-INDUSTRIALIZED COUNTRIES

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The literature about comparative librarianship has increased by large amounts during the last decade. During this time considerable energy has been given to defining both comparative librarianship and international librarianship. The work of such writers as Danton[1], Harvey[2], Jackson[3], Shores[4], Simsova[5] and others have adequately defined the fields and presented the necessary parameters. Also, comparative librarianship has gained sufficient recognition as a bona-fide specialization within librarianship to warrant inclusion in library science curricula. Most educational programs in library science in North America and in other parts of the world offer at least one course in comparative librarianship.

Despite the goodwill and considerable writing that has been done under the heading of comparative librarianship much of it is hardly related to "comparative study." In this regard Danton notes that credible research in comparative librarianship must include: "(1) a cross-societal or cross cultural element which does not mean a cross-country/cross national element; (2) actual comparisons, which are more than simply the juxtaposition of like data from two or more societies being studied; and (3) explanation, or at least discussion of the observed similarities and differences."[6]

It should be noted here that comparative librarianship is not being spoken of in this paper as being synonymous with international librarianship. The two terms are regarded as having different meanings, but both being of importance when trying to understand world librarianship. However, international librarianship is strictly limited to those activities that involve librarianship and all of its aspects across national boundaries. This, of course would exclude comparisons, but include such items as exchange

of librarians, books, ideas, and the study of library systems in different countries. Comparative librarianship should lean on the tradition of other comparative sciences such as found in political science, government and law. In other words comparative librarianship should be intellectually rigorous, utilizing quantitative and qualitative methodologies. Yet, comparative librarianship must be alive and have more than academic importance. It should respond to application -- it should be usable.

Hopefully, librarians will see comparative librarianship contributing to solving complex library problems. The above statements no doubt raise some natural questions: What is the usefulness of comparative librarianship? Can comparative librarianship be of any real value in non-industrialized countries? Is it fair or reasonable to compare aspects of librarianship in an industrialized nation with those of a non-industrialized nation? As an example, what can the United States learn from Nigerian librarianship?

Before any of the above questions can be fully answered one must consider the social, economic and cultural realities that are found in all countries. The importance of these factors has been made very clear to me during the years I have taught abroad and had to counsel students from overseas. All too often students studying comparative librarianship lack (1) sufficient background of the country(ies) being studied. The same occurs among practicing librarians who wish to use comparative librarianship studies and (2) understanding the library milieu in their own countries. I maintain that the two above conditions are prerequisites to fully making use of comparative librarianship.

Insufficient Background on the Country

In order to fully understand the role or state-of-affairs of librarianship as a whole or in part one must be able to put the library problem in

context. That is, see how that part called librarianship is related to the non-library parts. As an example, the librarian studying comparative library education in Anglophone Africa, the United States and the United Kingdom will find such study meaningful if he understands something of the historical and political factors of colonialism in Africa. The residue of colonialism lingers for years after independence.

I believe just as important as historical and political factors is some understanding of geography and climate in Africa, the United States and England. Both of these factors can furnish clues to transportation, roads, and economic conditions. Planning, building and the use of libraries are essentially dependent on roads and the availability of capital. Closely related to geography and climate are demographic factors, which includes such factors as total number of inhabitants; education levels, especially literacy; racial composition; age groups; and urban-rural distributions. The above demographic factors are important when planning most types of services and systems, including libraries.

The extent of a nation's communications systems can bear directly on library developments. Communication includes languages and dialects; numbers of newspapers; availability of books and magazines and how well they are distributed; film production; and radio and television. If we take book production in vernacular languages we can immediately see that stocking a library with readable materials gets to be a problem in a nation with many dialects and languages. Library development in Papua New Guinea is frustrated by the fact that there are over 600 languages spoken in that nation. In the United States it would be primarily money, but it other parts of the world it would be money as well as other factors.

Economic systems will have different meanings and values according to where you are on the map. Currency does not have the same meaning in parts of the Pacific islands as it has in Hawaii. As an example, bartering is still significant in Samoa. In this same vein free public library to me does not have the same meaning to a government official in a country that charges a membership fee for using the public library.

As we have seen, the absorption of background information on countries being studied is a first step in utilizing comparative librarianship. Closely allied to background information about the country is understanding of the existing ~~library~~ system(s) and the information needs of the population.

The Library Milieu

The first role for comparative studies is there must be problems that can be studied and compared. In other words one must have something to compare. Among my students from overseas I frequently encounter those who have no knowledge or experience of their own national library system. Many of the students have had only limited library work experience or none at all. It is impossible for such students to put all of the missing puzzle together while they are students. It is impossible for them to get the fullest benefits of comparative librarianship when they come to study with this handicap. Let me hastily add that I feel the same way about American students who frequently have little understanding of the background of their own country.

Familiarity with library tradition and history is essential for understanding contemporary library events, as well as landmarks in library

developments in a country. The user of comparative librarianship should know something about existing library legislation, financial support and other national and local responsibilities for they will have direct bearing on goals and objectives.

If there are national library plans and studies these, too, will prove to be of value for background and perspective. For it is the library/information infrastructure that provides the framework for all comparative study.

Comparisons of What?

There are two approaches I propose to comparative study in librarianship: (a) comparison between non-industrialized countries and (b) comparison between industrialized and non-industrialized countries.

A. Comparison Between Non-Industrialized Countries

In those countries that have not reached a highly technical state of industry, there is (1) increasing recognition of information as a national resource. Though this movement is slow it is nevertheless a beginning (2) the spreading dependence of knowledge by those in positions of policy making and the educated classes and (3) the need to continue to recognize and fulfill unique information needs of the average citizen. If these three assumptions are correct then most of the Third World countries are in some stage, from very beginning to advance, of organizing library and information services. Third World countries have organized their services either formally, and supported by centralized government in most instances, or informally organized with very minimum government support.

As an example of comparisons between two non-industrialized nations institutions of higher education in Papua New Guinea and Fiji can be

used. Both of these countries in the South Pacific have university libraries that are actively supporting vibrant academic and research programs in Polynesia and Melanesia. Why can't the academic libraries in both of these nations be compared? Why can't these comparative studies be used and prove profitable to the University of the West Indies or the University of Guyana?

If Kenya and Nigeria have developed standards for library services why can't they be studied and be of help to Papua New Guinea or the Gambia? These are hypothetical problems that could be useful comparative studies. In this regard it would help if the actual benefits of comparative librarianship in the non-industrialized nations were known. As of now it appears that there have been no studies that look at the role of comparative librarianship in the non-industrialized world.

B. Comparison Between Industrialized and Non-Industrialized Countries

There has been some skepticism among scholars as to the relevance of comparative studies between highly industrialized nations and those that are not industrialized. The concern is basically on the question of what can a non-industrialized nation offer to an industrialized nation in library development? Can comparative librarianship among industrialized and non-industrialized nations help identify mutual problems? Offer insights to solving problems that are unique to an industrialized nation?

These are intriguing questions since so much of international librarianship has been one-way the non-industrialized nations usually borrowing ideas or techniques from the industrialized nations. In some cases this has not been productive for the non-industrialized nation, especially when systems and techniques have been superimposed by an

industrialized nation. Invariably the failure came about because the techniques or systems were not in harmony with the mores or prevailing cultural patterns of the recipient nation. Asheim observed that "our provincial notion that everybody really wants our kind of free and open library is quite mistaken." In fact, in Francophone Africa "the American model is seen as inferior to the French -- as indeed it may be to serve a system of French education."[7]

It would appear that with the growth and development of education throughout the world comparative studies of various types and levels of libraries in education systems would be fruitful fields of study. As an example studies of school library administration, academic libraries and public libraries and literacy education could be mutually beneficial to the United States and countries in the Caribbean. Certainly the United States and Ethiopia could benefit from Cuba's experience in using public libraries in the drive to eradicate illiteracy. In the United States the American Library Association is still trying to persuade public librarians that they do have a role to play in the national effort to conduct literacy programs.

In the area of library philosophy and administration comparative studies that looked at trends and presented public library data, interpreted the significance of the data and expounded on cause and effect could go a long way in re-evaluating service and establishing goals and objectives. Comparing public libraries in Nigeria and the United States could prove beneficial to both industrialized and non-industrialized nations because of the fact that Nigerian librarianship has made great strides during the last decade.

In the United States the profession has not successfully dealt with the status of library technicians as a class of library workers. My personal observation is that in the commonwealth countries, especially in Africa, the Caribbean and Oceania the library assistant is looked upon as a very important member of the library staff and poses no threat to the professional. Yet in the United States we have been historically ambiguous in working with the library assistant or technician. Could not American librarianship learn from the nations that comprise COMLA (Commonwealth Library Association)?

Further, it would appear that the industrialized nations could look forward to mutual sharing of comparative studies in other areas such as program planning, national planning, financing libraries, coordination of resources and services and technical innovations. The mutual sharing and study of librarianship on a comparative basis could broaden professional viewpoints, stimulate consideration of one's own national library system and point to needed areas for further development and research.

Finally, comparative librarianship offers the opportunity to look at those theories and practices of librarianship in different countries for the purpose of solving and broadening understanding of library problems.

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